



Parent Focus Group- Communications

Thursday 9th June- 2:30pm

Staff members present:

- Ellie Linton (EL)- Communications & Marketing Manager
- Sarah Greenway (SG)- EMA (Ethnic Minority Achievement) Lead, Reading Recovery Teacher, Parental Links SIP Lead

1	Introduction
1.1	EL introduced herself as the school's new Communications & Marketing Manager, and welcomed parents to the focus group. EL explained that the purpose of the focus group was to get parent feedback on the new communications tools, such as the app and the 'Weekly Update' email, and to also hear what parents' views and suggestions for improvement for existing communications methods, such as social media and the website.
2	Weekly Update
2.1	Parents felt that it was much better to have all letters emailed at same time every week as part of the Weekly Update e-shot. They found the e-shot to be visually pleasing and said that the content and length were appropriate. They said that the use of photos made the e-shot easier to skim and find the information that if relevant to them, making it easy to understand. One parent said that the e-shot had reminded her of an event that was happening the following week that she would have otherwise forgotten because the letter was sent out last term.
2.2	EYFS parents were happy for The Hoot to be emailed separately to the Weekly Update. All parents agreed that they were happy for more urgent emails to be sent out separate to the Weekly Update, if it needed to be read sooner than a Thursday afternoon, which is when the e-shot goes out.
2.3	Parents shared their appreciation for the reduction in texts, and the elimination in 'unnecessary' texts. They also like the decrease in the number of emails sent out by the school.
2.4	Some parents complained about the fact that, when letters are emailed outside of the Weekly Update, they often don't know what the letter is about until they open the attachment. They would prefer to have more info in the body of the email, or even have the letter pasted into the email body, as well as the attachment. Action: <i>All emails sent with letters attached are to either have the full letter pasted into the body of the email, or enough information in the subject and body to make it clear to parents what the letter is about.</i>
2.5	One parent said that she was not aware of the 'Weekly Update', and suggested that more needs to be done to alert parents to the fact that emails are now only going out once a week. Another parent suggested that the 50% average open rate may be because the Weekly Update ends up in parents' junk mail folders.

	Action: <i>Ensure that all parents are reminded about the existence of the Weekly Update and asked to check their mailbox settings to make sure that the email does not go into their junk folder each week.</i>
2.6	One parent shared her confusion over the communications schedule (eg. When the Weekly Update and The Hoot come out) Action: <i>A communications schedule is to be sent out to all parents making them aware of when communications are to be sent out each week.</i>
3	Our Schools App
3.1	Most parents at the focus group said that they used the app on a regular basis. One parent in particular said that she uses the app all the time, whereas another parent said that she uninstalled the app, as it kept crashing her phone. Action: <i>EL to contact the app's software developers to find out if something can be done to prevent the app from crashing.</i>
3.2	Whereas one parent found the app's integration with their phone calendar useful, another parent said that this is what they disliked about the app, as many of the events were not relevant to her children. EL showed how parents can disable the calendar feature on their phones, but explained that it is not possible to only receive events that are relevant to one particular year group.
3.3	One parent said he was underwhelmed by the functionality of the app, and EL explained that the school was limited by the software, which only allows for a certain amount of features (eg. Calendar, contacts, news).
4	Social Media
4.1	Parents noted that social media posts had become more colourful and frequent, and that the content had become richer in recent weeks.
4.2	One parent said that they liked the 'Faceswap Friday' feature, but that they would like to know the answers as they sometimes don't know who the members of staff are in the photo. Action: <i>Every Monday we will reveal the 'answer' to Friday's faceswap, showing the original unedited photo. This would help parents get to know the faces of members of staff they may not normally come into contact with.</i>
4.3	EL mentioned that the school is considering expanding its social media presence with an Instagram account, and asked parents if they would use this platform. The parents present at the focus group said that they did not use Instagram and so would not follow a school account, but it was suggested that more parents should be asked for their opinion. Action: <i>A parent survey will be carried out to determine whether any parents/carers would follow and interact with a school Instagram account, should it be introduced.</i>
5	Text Messages
5.1	Parents noted that they have received far fewer text messages over the past few months, and that the messages they are receiving via text are now always appropriate to them.
5.2	Parents like the way they can respond to text messages, but find it frustrating when they do not get a text back from the office acknowledging the reply.

	Action: <i>All texts that warrant a reply will get a reply from the school office by text, email or phone. Please note that the office is only able to view replies that are sent on the same day as the original message.</i>
5.3	One parent shared the story of a text that was sent containing incorrect information, meaning that another message had to be sent out correcting the details. Action: <i>Office staff to double-check details with relevant teacher/staff member before sending a text out to parents.</i>
6	Website
6.1	Parents said that the pages that they use the most are the 'School Letters' page and the calendar. They said they found it very useful to have all the letters on the website. EL asked if parents would find it useful to have a link to the letters page from the homepage, and parents said that they would find this useful as they would not have to navigate through the menus. Action: <i>A link is to be added to the homepage so that parents can quickly and easily access the letters page.</i>
6.2	Parents shared the following concerns/complaints about the website: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Old-fashioned - Not user or mobile friendly - Horrible font - SIMS Agora too much of a focus point on the homepage- should be moved to lower down the page - Photos need updating - Slideshow on homepage does not work properly - Links too small to press on mobile phone Actions: <i>EL to speak to website developers to see what can be done to make the site more user and mobile friendly, based on parent feedback. New photos to be arranged with photographer and added to website.</i>
7	Other
7.1	One parent commented that, although outward communication has improved greatly over the last half term, inward communication is still poor, and that it needs to be easier to register queries or complaints. Another parent concurred that she feels that the new 'inbox@oswaldroad...' email that has been set up seems like an intimidating barrier for parents and that it is off-putting having to send queries to an email address that is not associated with a particular member of staff. The parent said that she was not comfortable sending personal or confidential information to the inbox, and that she would feel much better about being able to email her children's teachers directly. Note to parents: <i>All parents who share this concern- please be aware that the 'inbox@oswaldroad.manchester.sch.uk' email address is picked up by our School Business Manager Sarah Nicholls and Acting Headteacher Jon Beisly, who then forward the emails on to the relevant member of staff. Parents can expect a response within 2 working days, unless the email is received within the school holidays.</i>
7.2	Parents said they felt that the new rule on not being able to bring your child to the classroom in the morning made it feel as though the school was becoming more

	<p>'hands-off', and making parents feel excluded. One parent said that it is making it hard for those parents who are wanting to support or engage with the school. One parent said that they would like to be able to pass on quick questions to their child's class teacher, and suggested that sending old-fashioned paper notes to the teacher in the morning might be a solution.</p> <p>Action: <i>EL to discuss with Acting Headteacher Jon Beisly to see how this issue can be improved in a way that works for both parents and teachers.</i></p>
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